



Commandant's NOTE

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EXCELLENCE IN WEAPON MARKSMANSHIP

In 1907, Lieutenant General Arthur MacArthur, then commander of the Pacific Division, established a School of Musketry for his Division at the Presidio of Monterey, California. The general had only recently returned from the Philippine Islands, where the Army had been engaged in counterinsurgency operations for a number of years, and where the Infantry's operations had disclosed a serious decline in its marksmanship skills. This decline was attributed to increased urbanization and the fact that city-bred Army volunteers were no longer as familiar with firearms as their rural predecessors.

Six years later, in 1913, the School, which had been quite successful in improving the Infantry's shooting skills, was moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and in 1917 its name was changed to the Infantry School of Arms. By this time, the Army's senior Infantry leaders had come to realize that the blood-drenched battlefields of Europe required far more than just well-trained rifle shooters who could hit a target on the practice range; they also called for Infantrymen skilled in all combat conditions of modern warfare, as much at home with the enemy's various weapons and weapon systems as with their own rifles, hand grenades, pistols, machineguns, trench mortars, and trench knives.

A year later the School moved to Fort Benning and there its name was shortened to its present one—The Infantry School. From that day to this, the subject of Infantry weapons proficiency—not just rifle marksmanship—has remained a high priority in our programs of instruction.

Today, we at the Infantry School are placing increased emphasis on developing both individual and collective firing proficiency standards with all of our weapon systems, from the hand grenade to the 25mm gun of the Bradley fighting vehicle. We feel that Infantry commanders at the squad, platoon, and company levels must learn to develop their maneuver and fire plans to increase the effectiveness of the available weapon systems and to decrease the vulnerability of their units to enemy fires.

To accomplish this, our Infantry leaders must fully understand the capabilities and limitations of the weapons they have, and the proficiency of the soldiers who are to employ those weapons. Local defeats are almost invariably caused by ineffective fire. The lessons of history have shown that a unit's success in battle depends largely on the quality of its training and the quality of its leaders.

As I mentioned in an earlier Commandant's Note, we have integrated a "train-the-trainer" module into our leader courses. The aim is to make sure our Infantry units get knowledgeable leaders who can train and assess weapon proficiency tasks and effectively employ Infantry firepower. We offer a number of specialized courses such as a sniper course, a mortar platoon course, a TOW trainer course, and a Bradley master gunner course, which get at the essence of direct and indirect fire gunnery. We are also developing advanced courses of fire with higher standards for Infantrymen. These will be incorporated into our Infantry one station unit training programs and our training publications.

We recognize, however, that this goes only part way toward resolving the Army's marksmanship and weapon proficiency problems. What we need more than anything else is direct involvement by our field commanders.

Leaders need to stress the importance of marksmanship at all levels, from the top down. Units must implement individual and collective weapon proficiency training on a year-round schedule, and employ training devices during all phases of the program. For example, the Multi-purpose Arcade Combat Simulator (MACS) has been in use for several years, and the Infantry School is now helping units procure MACS as an interim measure until a new marksmanship sustainment device is fielded in 1990.

Commanders must also conduct and evaluate small unit collective live firing as often as a unit's resources will permit. Unit officers must actively participate in proficiency evaluations and must be thoroughly familiar with all the weapon systems in their units. (It is difficult to imagine an Infantry officer who does not jump at every opportunity to increase his mastery of his unit's weapons.)

Infantry officers serving on battalion, brigade, and division staffs should be required to demonstrate proficiency with their assigned weapons at least twice a year, if not more frequently. In future wars, there may well be as much action in the rear areas as there is at the front, so it behooves all staff members to cross train on and become intimately familiar with every weapon they can get their hands on. Cooks, bakers, clerks, and mechanics have been called on in the past to perform as Infantrymen, and they may well be called on in the future to do so again.

We must also allocate time to the hands-on study of foreign weapons. Our soldiers should become familiar with the basic weapons used by potential opponents throughout the world. If possible, they should be allowed to fire those weapons. In this way our soldiers will not only be able to use the weapons if they have to, but they will also know the different sounds those weapons make when compared with their own. This can be important in close-in fighting.

The Infantry School's wealth of instructional material and experience in doctrinal development is available to all Infantry units, no matter where they are stationed. The new version of Field Manual 23-9, M16A1 and M16A2 Rifle Marksmanship, was distributed to the field this past summer. It is designed to lead trainers through the process of planning, conducting, and evaluating performance-oriented marksmanship instruction. Other weapon and marksmanship manuals are also being developed.

Our goal is to train and field a professional Infantry force that is led by commissioned and noncommissioned officers who can command and train their units, and who will provide the concerned leadership and guidance our soldiers deserve.

Finally, at the Infantry School we are eager to learn from your experience so that we can disseminate successful training techniques throughout the Army and ensure that our doctrinal publications reflect the best thinking and judgment of all professional Infantrymen. We look forward to hearing from you.